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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 KUWAIT 004314

SIPDIS

STATE FOR NEA/ARPI

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SUBJECT: FREEDOM AGENDA: BACKGROUND ON ELECTORAL
CONSTITUENCIES IN KUWAIT

REF: KUWAIT 4008

Classified By: Ambassador Richard LeBaron for reason 1.4 (b)

1. (C) Paragraph two is a translation of a document on reform of electoral constituencies in Kuwait, drafted by Shaykh Nassar Al-Sabah Al-Ahmed Al-Sabah, the son of the Prime Minister and an advisor to the Amir and PM, on December 17, 2002. Shaykh Nassar provided the Ambassador with a copy following their September 10 meeting and noted that he was urging his father to reduce the number of electoral districts (reftel). While the information is slightly dated, debate around the issue has not changed, and the document provides useful background.

2. (SBU) Begin text:

First: Historic Background and Information

1) A resolution was issued designating the electoral constituencies for the Constituent Assembly elections. (Note: The Constituent Assembly, which met from December 30, 1961 to January 15, 1963, was primarily responsible for drafting the Constitution, which outlined the roles and responsibilities of the different government bodies, including the National Assembly. End note.) There were ten constituencies, each electing two MPs. The resolution was published in edition 347 of the official Gazette, "Kuwait Al-Youm," on September 10, 1961.

2) In 1962, the Constituent Assembly ratified Law No. 35 outlining election procedures for National Assembly members. The law designated ten electoral constituencies, each electing five MPs. It was published in edition 378 of the official Gazette, "Kuwait Al-Youm," on November 13, 1962.

3) The first (1963), second (1967), third (1971), and fourth (1975) National Assembly elections were conducted on the basis of the ten constituency electoral system.

4) The division of the ten constituencies in the last elections (January 27, 1975) (prior to the amendment of the electoral law increasing the number of districts) were conducted as follows: The first constituency incorporated the neighborhoods of Al-Sharq, Dasman, Bnaid Al-Gar, Al-Mattabba, Al-Bloush and Al-Sawaber. The second constituency incorporated the neighborhoods of Qibla, Mirgab and Salhiya. The third constituency incorporated the neighborhoods of Shuwaikh, Suleibikhat, Jahra, desert and Laborers City. The fourth constituency incorporated the neighborhoods of Shamiya, Roudha, Farwaniya, Jileeb Al-Shoyoukh, Udhailiya. The fifth constituency incorporated the neighborhoods of Kaifan, Khaldiya, Abraq Khaitan, Surra. The sixth constituency incorporated the neighborhoods of Qadisiya, Mansouriya, Faiha, Al-Hadika. The seventh constituency incorporated the neighborhoods of Dasma, Di'iya, Failaka and all islands. The eighth constituency incorporated the neighborhoods of Hawalli, Nugra, Kaberiya, Udailiya. The ninth constituency incorporated the neighborhoods of Salmiya, Rumaithiya, Bida', Al-Ras and Al-Shi'ib. The tenth constituency incorporated the neighborhoods of Ahmadi, Magwa', Wara, Subaihiya, Ji'aidan, Burqan, Fahahil, Mangaf and Fintas.

5) During the dissolution of the National Assembly (from 1976 to 1981), the Government issued an Amiri Decree by Law No. 99/1980 canceling the electoral divisions as established by the Constituent Assembly, and re-districting the electoral constituencies for the National Assembly elections. It was published in edition 1332 of the official Gazette, "Kuwait Al-Youm," on December 21, 1980. Accordingly, the number of the electoral constituencies was increased from 10 to 25, and the number of MPs elected from each constituency was reduced from five to two.

Second: Remarks on elections under the ten constituencies, which were instituted by the Constituent Assembly

Elections were conducted primarily on the basis of national political issues of general concern. The number of predominantly tribal electoral constituencies was not more

than four of the ten constituencies. Each constituency incorporated an average of five neighborhoods; the difference between the number of voters in each constituency was limited.

Third: Remarks on elections under the current 25 electoral constituencies division

The number of primarily tribal electoral constituencies increased (with the change in the electoral system), becoming 13 of the 25 constituencies. Tribal and sectarian election primaries, not practiced under the previous electoral system, began to be conducted under the new system. (Note: The smaller constituencies allowed tribal and/or sectarian groups which dominated a particular constituency to conduct primaries before the general elections to choose their own candidates, effectively engineering electoral outcomes. End note.) Due to the small size of each constituency and the possibility of influencing a limited number of voters, vote-buying activities, previously limited to only a few constituencies, increased. Pressures on MPs to attend to the demands of their constituents for services and processing paperwork through government ministries also increased due to the small size of the constituencies and the tribal representation of the voters. (Note: Support for many MPs, particularly those from tribal areas, is based on their ability to deliver services, such as using their "wasta" (influence) to process paperwork through government ministries, thus giving rise to the label "Service Deputies." End note.) Differences in the number of voters in each constituency increased. There were also constituencies covering only one residential neighborhood, and some that incorporated residential areas not connected geographically, such as Salmiya and Salwa (which are incorporated in one constituency, bypassing over Rumaithiya which separates them). With the number of MPs elected from each district reduced from five to two, the candidates were forced to compete for votes among a smaller number of voters, increasing the intensity of electoral competitions.

Fourth: Ten Constituencies as prelude for reform

The reinstatement of the ten constituency electoral system, with the addition of the new residential areas, is an appropriate prelude to electoral reform. The size of the constituencies will be bigger and will incorporate several neighborhoods, as opposed to one or two. The average number of voters in each constituency will be around 12,000; the total number of voters is now more than 126,000. (Note: This information was current in 2002 and does not include women, who were given the right to vote in May 2005. Post estimates the total voting population is now around 380,000. End note.) This will weaken the tribal, sectarian, and familial influence on elections. It will also curb vote-buying activities and reduce the pressures of the voters on the candidates and MPs to attend to their demands for services and processing government paperwork. Elections under the ten constituency system will be based on issues of general concern.

End text.

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